

THE SPIRITUAL COMBAT OF SHI'ISM



HENRI CORBIN

BERSERKER

BOOKS



Henry Corbin
In Iranian Islam
« *The Spiritual Combat of Shi'ism* »
vol. I, pp. 79-110



Henry Corbin [1903-1978]
Lord have Mercy on him, al-Fâtihah

- (1) بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
 - (2) الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ
 - (3) الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
 - (4) مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ
 - (5) إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ
 - (6) اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ
 - (7) صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ
- غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ

Translation from French

*

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ

About the author :

Henry Corbin, born on April 14, 1903 in Paris and died on October 7, 1978 in the same city, was a French philosopher, translator and Orientalist.

In 1933, he married Stella Leenhardt (1910-2003) who became the inseparable companion and collaborator of all his work.

He is one of the few philosophers to deal with Iranian Islam in general and Shiite gnosis in particular.

Corbin translated, interpreted and edited some of the classics of this tradition, whose great names such as Sohrawardi, Molla Sadra Shirazi, Rûzbehân Baqlî Shîrâzî and also the Sufi Ibn Arabi and his Shi'ite disciple Haydar Amoli, are gradually broadening a philosophical horizon that is also becoming globalized. (*fr.wikipedia.org*)



Henry Corbin and his wife Stella Lennhardt with whom he is buried in the cemetery of Montmorency in the Val-d'Oise (95) in France.

[Henry Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, vol. I, p. 79-110] : « (...) It is still important to say more, in order to dissipate the equivocation created in the West by the use of a terminology speaking of « Shi'ite legitimism » or Shi'ism as the cause of the « legitimists » in Islam. No, the cause of the Imâms does not represent a dynastic legitimism in competition with any rival dynaste of this world, any more, as we have already said, than the dynasty of the Grail is in competition with a dynasty of this world or with the succession of the Apostolic See. It is ridiculous to reduce the question to these terms of rivalry. Rivalry is only possible between two different worlds; the world of malakût dominates the world of our competitions from too high a level to have to compete with it.

On this point, it is precious for us to gather the testimony, among others, of an eminent theosophist of the Safavid period, Qazî Sa'îd Qommî (ob. 1103/1691), in his monumental commentary of a work of one of the most ancient Shi'î doctors, Shaykh Sadûq Ibn Bâbuyeh. He writes: « It is well established by Tradition that the Messenger of God, after he was given the choice between being a servant and a king, chose to be a servant-prophet (*'abd nabî*), not a king-prophet (*malik nabî*). Therefore, there can be no exoteric kingship (*saltanat zâhira*, i.e. temporal) for him, nor any sovereignty of the kind exercised by the powerful of this world (*imârat al-jabâbira*). Since this kingship did not belong to him, how could it have been the lot of anyone who succeeded him? Therefore, if the prophet has a successor, it is necessary that this succession consists in the religious succession (*khilâfat dînîya*), guaranteeing to the faithful the best conditions of the viaticum and the Return, and that this spiritual kingship (*salatanat ma'nawîya*) falls to the one who is of constant devotion, the one who can be read as the very soul of the Prophet, as the Prophet declared with regard to 'Alî, al-Hasan and al-Hosayn¹. » This statement is perfectly explicit; it best

¹ This text appears in the great commentary of Qâzî Sa'îd Qommî on the

expresses the strictly religious conception of spiritual Islam among the Shi'ite commentators, those from whom we have to learn.

These essential features of imâmat as « spiritual royalty » and as essentially « invisible » in the present state of the world, only follow from the notion of *walâyat*, which necessarily reappears as a leitmotif throughout the present pages. Let us now specify another implication, this one preparing us to hear one of our two paradoxes. The word *mahabbat* (love) is often used in the texts as a doublet with the word *walâyat*, or as a substitute for it, to designate the dilection, the love, of which the person of the holy Imâms is the object of their followers. More precisely, it is said that the acceptance of this *walâyat* is as inseparable from the recognition of the mission of the Prophet (*nobowwat*) as the acceptance of the latter is from the *tawhîd*, the Attestation of the One. The attestation, the *shahâdat*, is in fact a triple attestation, without which a *moslim* (someone who professes Islam) is not a true believer (a *mu'min*)². Now, in the practice

Kitâb al-Tawhîd of Ibn Bâbüyeh (381/991) chap. II, 3rd hadîth, 3rd matlab, fol. 136b (ms. pers.). A follower had come to speak with the tenth Imâm 'Alî Naqî, whom the Abbasid police were holding prisoner in the camp of Samarra. The long text forms a complete symbol of the Shi'ite Imâmite faith. Qâzi Sa'îd repeatedly returns to the theme of Imâmat as purely spiritual kingship. This is important to note, because poor philosophies of history too often tend to « explain » the retreat into the spiritual realm and eschatological hopes as compensation for political frustrations. In addition to the fact that this kind of explanation totally misunderstands what it is about, it should be noted that Qazi Sa'îd was writing in the middle of the Safavid period when there could be no question, for Shi'ism, of frustration of a political nature. But just as in the hadîth it is always religious themes that the Imâms discuss with their disciples, so our thinkers have always known that the meaning of the Imâmat transcends all political reality of this world, because its « dimension » is essentially eschatological.

2 The triple *shahâdat* or Attestation of faith which, from a simple *moslim*, makes a *mu'min* or shi'ite faithful includes: the attestation of the One (*tawhîd*), the attestation of the prophetic mission (*nobowwat*) and the attestation of the *walâyat* of the Imâms; cf. among others *Tafsîr Mir'ât al-anwâr*, Moqaddamat I, Maqâlat II, pp. 23-88

of *walâyat* towards the « Holy Family », Shi'ite Islam shows itself as a religion of love, very different from this legalistic spirit which passes for being in general that of Islam, and to which the general attitude of Sunni Islam undoubtedly corresponds. But our Shi'ite doctors, relying on their most explicit hadîth, teach that without this intention and service of love that the term *walâyat* connotes, no good work produced by men could meet the divine approval. In this respect, Shi'ism, which has been presented so often as the antithesis of Sufism, is in fact ahead of Sufism on the path that characterizes it. But at the same time a serious question arises: if it is true that many fervent Shi'isms have shown reticence towards Sufism, what about the relationship between Shi'ism and Sufism in the beginning?

One of the most serious questions that Sufism faced (cf. infra book III, the case of Rûzbehân) was to know if, yes or no, love (the feeling and the word) can intervene in the relations between man and his God. There were very different answers on this point. But let us note this: if Shi'ism maintains, through its apophatic theology, the absolute transcendence of *tawhîd*³, it is precisely thanks to its imâmology that it preserves *tawhîd* from the double trap of metaphysical idolatry, namely agnosticism and naive anthropomorphism. He avoids this double trap, by recognizing in the pre-eternal theophanic person of the Imâms, the support of the divine Names and Attributes. By contemplating in the theophanic reality of the Imâm the revealed divine « Face » (this theme of

3 [There is a necessary interconnection between the negative or apophatic theology (*tanzîh*) of Shi'ism and its imâmology positing the « epiphanic function » of the Imâms (*mazharîya*) as manifesting not the divine Essence (the *dhât*) but the divine operation or « energy » (the *fi'l*). Cf. our communication on Imâmologie et philosophie (Colloque de Strasbourg 1968, supra p. 65, n. 46). The negative theology is exposed with all its rigor in a long khotba (preaching) pronounced in Merv by the VIIIth Imâm Alî Rezâ, and inserted in the *Kitâb al-Tawhîd* of Ibn Bâbüyeh, chapter II, 2nd hadîth. The commentary of Qâzî Sa'îd Qommî on this text is fundamental.

the « Face » already indicated above, chap. I, 3, and to which we shall return again), Shî'ism from the beginning, even before Sufism had confronted the problem, discovered in the human creature the meaning of the love that intervenes between him and his God.

This is what the *walâyat* is about, the « esoteric of the prophetic message », the idea of the Imâm as a guide to the inner world (*bâtin*). And when we say inner world, we are not talking about the contrast that we usually mark by using the words « objective » and « subjective ». Perhaps it is difficult to make this clear nowadays, when a certain agnosticism that still claims to be Christian has nothing but contempt for what it calls « interior and subjective religiosity », because their « involvement » in the affairs of this world has not given these pious agnostics time to understand what it is all about. In contrast, for all our esotericists, the inner world refers to the spiritual reality of supra-sensible universes which, as a spiritual reality, is the one that encircles and envelops the reality of the outer world. A Shi'ite thinker like Qâzî Sa'îd Qommî insists particularly on this paradox: in the circles of spiritual universes, unlike in the material circles, it is the center which « surrounds » the periphery. To « come out » of what we commonly call the external world is not a « subjective » experience, but as « objective » as possible, even if it is difficult to convey the evidence of it to a mind that wants to be « modern ».

That said, Shi'ism, in the course of its history, has not always been allowed to affirm purely and simply what makes up its essence, as we have just indicated allusively. We said above that it had to face a test and a paradox similar to what Ismailism faced during the Fatimid period. Notwithstanding the analogy, the few features already revealed, and on which we will insist later, warn us that this ordeal must have had a different character, if only because of the concept of the Imâm and the Imâmat, which is dominated, in Twelver Shî'ism, by

the figure of the XXIst Imâm and by the idea of his necessary occultation (ghaybat). But it remains that after having been forced, during a long period, to a more or less rigorous clandestinity, Shi'ism could finally, under the Iranian sovereignty once restored by the Safavids, live in broad daylight. In such circumstances, the temptation to settle in this world is great, and the more one settles in this world, the less one is inclined to emphasize the questions that hold the attention of mystical theosophists. Perhaps this is the main reason for the paradoxical invasion of Shi'ism by fiqh, legal science, to the detriment of all that is *'irfân* and *hikmat ilâhîya*, gnosis and mystical theosophy, taught by the Imâms themselves; this, even though the tradition of the *hokamâ* and the *'orafâ* has never been interrupted and represents something unique in Islam until today. We shall return later to this essential aspect of the « spiritual combat of Shi'ism ».

Hence it would seem, at first sight, that the situation is quite simple. On the one hand, there are the spiritualists who, faithful to the essence of Shi'ism, profess the entirety of Islam, that is, its exoteric and esoteric aspects; in a general way, all those who are designated as *'orafâ*, *hokamâ*, mystics and philosopher-theosophists (we shall see, below, in Book II, how Sohrawardî already established a hierarchy of degrees among them). And then, on the other hand, there would be those who, for one reason or another, fearing all that passes for « philosophy » in their eyes, stick to fiqh, to canon law, as if it were the Islamic science par excellence, not to say exclusive. They are the *foqahâ*, the doctors of the Law, those in whom their co-religionists have more than once denounced the paradox of Shi'ite doctors dropping the essential part of the teaching of their Imâm.

In fact the situation is even more complex than this dichotomy would suggest. And this complexity is largely due to the ambiguity of the original relationship between Shi'ism and Sufism, one of the reasons for which we suggested a few

lines ago. In Sunni Islam the situation is simple: Sufism and the Sufis have over the centuries attested and represented, in the face of the Doctors of the Law, the audacity of the inner religion and the paradoxes of the religion of love. In Shi'ite Islam it is not at all so simple, because from the beginning, the notion of *walâyat* dominates the whole Shi'ite doctrine. By the same token, the doctrine contains all the elements of the religion of love addressed to the Theophanic Figure, to the revealed Face of the transcendent and unknowable God in itself, to the Person who « answers for » this inaccessible God. As a pole of orientation of the metaphysical universes which it reveals to him; as a mystical pole, the invisible Imâm groups around him the whole of a spiritual hierarchy enveloped in the eyes of this world in the same incognito. All these elements are certainly found in Sufism and in the metaphysics of Sufism to the point of giving the impression, when it comes to Sunni Sufism, of a Shi'ism that no longer dares to speak its name. But for all that, precisely, the Shi'ism, on the condition that he lives the entirety of his Shi'ism, does not need Sufism as such, because his Shi'ism is already the « *tariqat* » (mystical way) as we indicated above (chap. I, 3, pp. 18 ff). In other words: the notion of Sufism (*tasawwuf*) does not cover the totality of the mystical life in Islam. And it is this very fact that made us ask the question above: what is the relationship between Shi'ism and Sufism in the beginning? that is to say, what is the relationship between spiritual Islam in the beginning?

To ask this question clearly is at least to avoid misunderstanding. It is not the existence of Shi'ite Sufism that provides, as such, the answer. Nor is it enough that a Shi'ite theologian expresses reticence and sometimes more, with regard to Sufism, to have to be classified among the doctors of the Law, the antimystics. Far from it. Many spiritual Shi'is speak exactly the language of the Sufis, and yet are not Sufis; they do not belong to any *tariqat*. Mollâ Sadrâ Shîrâzî, one of the greatest names among the mystical theosophists of Iran,

was even led to write a book against the Sufis of his time, while he himself was reproached for his Sufism by some of his colleagues. Sufism itself is very diverse. There is a whole Sufism which has developed an admirable metaphysics, verified by its spiritual experience; but there is also a Sufism which has disregarded all metaphysical knowledge. There is a Sufism in which Imâm devotion is preponderant, but there is also a Sufism in which the person of the shaykh tends to replace purely and simply the transcendent person of the Imâms.

Finally, one can say that there is a double paradox: there is the paradox of the Doctors of the Law, oblivious to the entirety of Shi'ism and its esoteric background; the paradox has become worse since the Safavid period, but the symptoms are manifest beforehand, just as the blossoming of the schools of thought of the Safavid period was prepared by the preceding generations. And there is the paradox of a certain Sufism that forgets its origins. It is this double paradox which put so many Shi'ite spirituals in the necessity of facing a « double front ». This was the case of Sadrâ Shîrâzî and of many others, up to the shaykhie school. Earlier, it was typically the case of Haydar Amoli (8th/14th century) who, in his monumental work, summarized at best, with a penetrating lucidity, the situation experienced by Shi'ite spirituals (cf. Book IV below). This is why the following pages will frequently refer to his work.

The complexity of this situation cannot be discovered at first sight; it requires many years spent not only in the frequentation of texts, but also in that of beings. What is at stake is a fundamental conception of man's destiny, our very knowledge of Islam. It is striking that what appears as constitutive of Shi'ite spirituality, and that we have just indicated very quickly, have so far gone unnoticed by Westerners as well as by most Sunni Muslims.

So we will ask Haydar Amoli in the following chapters how

he meditates on the Shi'i texts concerning the human situation typified in the case of Adam. In the light of this situation, certain conversations of the first Imâm 'Alî ibn Abî-Tâlib with his chosen disciple, Komayl ibn Ziyâd, take on a relief where the whole destiny of Shi'ism is already prefigured [...]. In other words, a Haydar Amoli, like a Molla Sadra Shîrâzî, and later the masters of the Shaykh school, situate for us the positions of what is still at stake today in what we have called the « spiritual combat of Shi'ism. »

Chapter III

The Spiritual Combat of Shi'ism

I - Situation of the Shi'ite spirituals

As if it were a sign of contradiction for this world, the Shi'ism of the Twelve Imams was the object of atrocious hatreds which rarely disarmed. They manifested themselves against the person of the First Imâm as well as in the tragic fate of his eleven descendants. But the Imâms themselves warned their followers that their cause was a difficult one, and that to sustain it they needed « hearts tested for faith ». As an eminent shaykh said to me, « Never forget that there were only a handful « of followers around our Imâms, and that it will be so until the end of time. » Because Shi'ism assumes before the world, essentially and integrally, the spiritual reality of the prophetic message of Islam, it could not make a pact with the ambitions and designs of this world. We do not have to make here a political history, but only to indicate why during the centuries (let us say since the entry of the Seljuk Turks in Baghdad, in 1055, putting an end to the influence of the Persian Shi'ite dynasty of the Bûyides), so many Shi'ite traces are lost, because in fact the Shi'ites observe, in the clandestinity, a rigorous « discipline of the arcane ». Thus, one sometimes hesitates about the Shi'ite belonging of an author,

while reading between the lines the confession that he cannot make explicitly.

A Persian treatise from the seventh and thirteenth centuries (the name of the author remains uncertain) expresses his indignation in this way: « If anyone asks,» writes our author, « why the science of the Sunni foqahâ is so widely spread in the world, while the same is not true of the science of the holy Imâms (*Ahl-e Bayt-e Rasûl*, the 'members of the house of the Prophet'), the answer is that, when Moses was a Muslim, he was a member of the House of the Prophet: The reason is that when Mo'awîya (the first of the Omayyads) had seized power over the Islamic community, he gave vent to his hatred against the Emir of the believers (the First Imâm, 'Alî ibn Abî-Tâlib); he wrote letters to all his prefects, ordering them to put to death anyone who claimed to be a member of the religion of 'Alî. ... They even cursed 'Alî from the pulpits of the mosques... The same hatred was directed against the descendants of the Imâm, so that it was difficult for them to make their knowledge known and to have pupils. It is said that Sofyan Thawrî came to Imâm Ja'far al-Sâdiq (the sixth Imâm) and the Imâm said to him: « O Sofyan, you are a man wanted by the Abbasid police; the Sultan has his eye on you. The Sultan has his eye on you. Go in haste, but it is not we who are driving you out. And when Abû Hanîfa (the head of the Hanafî rite in Sunnism) had to quote the Amir of the Believers during his lessons, he was content to mention him in these terms: the shaykh said this¹... Things did not get any better when the rule

¹ In his *Jâmi' al-asrâr* (published in *La philosophie shî'ite*, supra p. 56, n. 20) pp. 424-425, Haydar Âmolî recalls a pathetic scene that occurred between the sixth Imâm Ja'far al-Sâdiq and Abû Hanîfa who had been his pupil. We see there Abû Hanîfa inviting the Imâm to come to Kûfa to forbid people to insult the memory of the Companions of the Prophet: « The Imâm: They would not welcome what I will tell them. - A. H.: How could they not accept it from you, who are the son of the Messenger of God? - The Imâm: You are the first one to ignore me. You entered my house without my permission. You sat down without my order. You speak without my advice. It has come back to me that you speak by syllogism? - A.H.: Yes. - The Imâm:

of the Omayyads ended and the Abbasids came to power (132/750). The Imâms had to remain confined to their homes, observing taqîyeh (the « discretion » or « discipline of the arcane »). No one could freely go and help them, collect a riwâyat (transmission of a tradition) from them... On the other hand, all facilities were given to the foqahâ hostile to the Imâms. Their hatred and ignorance earned them all the honors; each one had a province (wilâyat) where he could at his ease propagate his science. All this is common knowledge. Let the wise man think about it. If, in spite of all this, there is something of the knowledge of the Imâms spread everywhere today, it is a proof that God is the guarantor of the religion of His Messenger, of the group of our Imâms and of their knowledge²! »

This gloomy picture suggests in short what the Shi'is had to endure from the « orthodoxy » of power. The last Imâms (tenth and eleventh Imâms) lived practically in captivity in the camp of Samarra (some hundred kilometers north of Baghdad), and left this world while they were still in their youth. Yet they too had fearless disciples to whom they transmitted their teachings (cf. the great encyclopedia of

Beware, O No'mân! The first one to make a syllogism was Iblis (Satan), when he was ordered to bow down to Adam: « You have created me from fire, » he said, « while he (Adam) was created from clay. » Then the Imâm began to ask Abû Hanîfa a series of questions concerning *fiqh* and *tafsîr*. To each answer, the Imâm retorts with a « Why then? » and the situation of Abû Hanîfa becomes untenable). This is how this man (Abû Hanîfa) spoke with the Pole of the Poles during his life, » Haydar Âmolî continues with a beautiful violence : « And this is the one that the 'ârif (Dâwûd Qaysarî) puts among the *Awliyâ* insignia! I testify by God! This is an enormous imposture. In truth, the aversion to the Shi'is and to some other Sufis is due to nonsense of this kind. If I were not afraid of going on, I would explain some of their sources (*osûl*) and their derivations (*forû'*) which would allow one to judge their position. But it is better to remain silent. »

2 Mo'taqâd al-Imâmîya (the faith professed by the Imamite Shi'is), a Persian treatise (no author's name) from the seventh / thirteenth century, on the Shi'ite Kalâm (*tawhîd*, prophethood, imâmat) and *fiqh* (law), ed. M. Meshkât and M.-T. Dânesht-Pajûh, Tehran 1339/1961, pp. 138-141

Majlisî mentioned above). Thus, the final reflection of our anonymous 13th century author attests to this *desperatio fiduciatius* (confident despair) which is at the bottom of the Shi'ite ethos. He writes himself in a century where appear, in full Mongolian torment, the great figures of the philosopher-theologian shî'ite Nasîroddîn Tûsî and of a master of the shî'ite Sufism like Sa'oddîn Hamûeyh. In the following century, the work of Haydar Âmolî and that of Rajab Borsî will appear; later still, in the century preceding the advent of the Safavids, the work of Ibn Abî Jomhûr to which we have already referred. All this would prove, if it were necessary, that here again « the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the believers ». That is why when we speak of the « spiritual combat of Shi'ism », it is not so much a question of this open struggle, where each one easily recognizes his own. It is about something more subtle, a fight against an inner threat and against a more difficult to recognize peril, because this threat and this peril, as we have just indicated in the previous pages, are formed at the very moment when the external appearances are those of success.

Judging things on the surface, one would not expect a danger to arise from a success as brilliant as the advent of the Safavids in Iran. Undoubtedly this danger did not arise with Shâh Esmâ'il, himself a Sufî, surrounded by Sufî companions, and who, as a young hero of fifteen years, had the audacity, in the great mosque of Tabrîz where he had just entered victoriously, to celebrate the prayer in the name of the holy Imâms in spite of the hostility of a Sunni population³. There

³ See the text quoted by Edward G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, vol. IV, Cambridge 1930, pp. 53. Certain cruel behaviors are not without casting their shadow on the person of Shâh Esmâ'il: there is no need to insist on them here. There is, on the other hand, reason to suggest that a phenomenological comparison between the significance of the advent of Shâh Esmâ'il (Shâh Isma'il, crowned in 905/1499, at the age of fourteen) as experienced on the one hand in Iran, and on the other hand in the course of time, would be very instructive, by and for the Iranian national conscience and the religious conscience shî'ite, and such as through the accounts of the

were then many links between the Safavid family and the Ni'matollah family, descended from Shâh Ni'matollah Walî Kermânî, one of the greatest masters of Shî'ite Sufism (ob. 834/1431) of the previous period⁴. But things changed profoundly with the reign of Shâh 'Abbâs the Great (1587-1628). It is not the history of this reign that concerns us here, but the situation of the spirituals, and on this situation the personal confidences of Mollâ Sadrâ Shîrâzî in his books, as well as the intention that dictated several of his books, edify us sufficiently (cf. *infra* Book V).

The Safavid renaissance was marked by a boom unique in the world of Islam, by the emergence of several schools of thinkers whose influence is still felt today, and whose leaders were Mîr Dâmâd, Sadrâ Shîrâzî, Mohsen Fayz, Rajab 'Alî Tabrîzî and many others, with their pupils and the pupils of their pupils. This is not to say, however, that their situation was absolutely comfortable. If Mollâ Sadrâ had to live for about ten years in retirement, in a hidden village in the secrecy of a valley not far from Qomm, he himself tells us the reason: the hostility of the foqahâ, their attitude closed to everything called *hikmat* and *'irfân*. One is then the witness of this paradox that we tried to situate, a few pages ago: the Shi'ite gnosis which had victoriously crossed several centuries of persecution and clandestinity, found itself, with the temporal success of Shi'ism, in front of a new kind of test to be faced. Things followed the course that one should expect from the human condition. Alongside the unique rise of the thought of the *hokamâ*, we see the formation and growing influence of a

travelers it appeared on the other hand at the time in Occident, like advent of a « new prophet », the « new Sufi » having to bring the end of Islam and the Turkish power; cf. for example André Chastel, Leonardo da Vinci par lui-même, Paris 1952, p. 164

4 Cf. Jean Aubin, Matériaux pour la biographie de Shâh Ni'matollâh Walî Kermânî (Bibl. Iranienne, vol. 7), Teheran-Paris, 1956. The edition of Shâh Ni'matollâh's works was undertaken by Mr. Javâd Nûbakhsh Kermânî (6 vol. published in 1968).

legalistic orthodoxy, more and more exclusively devoted to practical questions of canon law, jurisprudence, and casuistry, distrustful of all that is philosophy, theosophy, mysticism. It is difficult to speak of clericalism where there is no Church; but the foqahâ and the akhûnd have sometimes made up for this absence so well that the consequences have been felt to this day.

It is not only the pages of Mollâ Sadrâ which inform us of this: the misunderstanding which the shaykhie school later encountered is another example (cf. *infra* Book VI). I can say that even today in Iran, this preponderance of *fiqh* and *foqahâ* is a subject of frequent and discreet conversations between *hokamâ* and '*orafâ*'. How did this come about? How did the *fiqh*, the canon law, become so invasive? Certainly, *fiqh* is part of the training of every theologian-philosopher, but the painful situation has its origin in those foqahâ who claim to limit all theological science to *fiqh*. They thus mutilate the very teaching of the holy Imâms, and forbid Shi'ism to make its spiritual message known. However, the perpetuation and transmission of the spiritual message of the Imams are independent of the question of whether a particular Islamic society will reject or accept the introduction of the civil code in order to « adapt to the modern world ». Therefore, limiting Islamic science to *fiqh* condemns us to dead-end situations.

This is undoubtedly a well-known socio-religious phenomenon. The refusal of all that is « gnosis » is inspired by a dogmatic rationalism under which a conscious or unconscious agnosticism is hidden, and it is this refusal which gives rise to the situation characterized previously here as a situation where Shi'ism must somehow hide from itself, that is to say, where Shi'ism gnosis, in order to preserve its completeness, must somehow hide from official Shi'ism. However, the consciousness that Shi'ism had of itself from the beginning was the consciousness of being the esoteric of the prophetic message (*bâtin al-nobowwat*), and it was, according

to the pathetic formula of Imâm Ja'far, the religion of the « expatriates » (*ghorabâ*) from among the community of Mohammad. The fact that the temporal triumph has given rise to something like an official Shi'ism, expatriating the Imâm's expatriates, is what gives meaning to the « spiritual struggle of Shi'ism ». It is up to the Shi'ism to win in this fight [...]. For the « triumphal » period has already passed, and only those who will understand the Imâm's call will be able to face the dizzying problems raised in Shi'ism Islam, as elsewhere, by the impact of the West. And after all, this situation is not only that of traditional Islam in front of the so-called modern world: it is that, in front of this same world, of the whole fraction of humanity still capable of sensing the spiritual and supernatural destiny of man.

Iranian Islam has never lacked knights to lead this fight, from generation to generation, until our days. We said earlier that the Shi'ite spirituals had to face a « double front ». The work of Haydar Âmolî shows us that one of these fronts was itself a double front, because of the equivocation weighing on Sufism, according to whether one considers it as a witness of the shî'ism in *partibus sunnitarum*, or as a defector forgetting its origins. To understand this, let us insist once again on this type of Shi'ite spirituals who speak a technical language not different from that of the Sufis, and who profess a theosophy where many non-Shi'ite Sufis can easily find their way. They too have dreams, visionary experiences. And yet, they do not belong to Sufism.

This is precisely the situation which, on the one hand, led Mollâ Sadrâ to take a stand against the ignorant *foqahâ*, and which, on the other hand, led him to write a treatise against certain Sufis of his time [5], whose pious agnosticism professed contempt for books, and whose pious agnosticism professed contempt for books, rejection of philosophical meditation as a spiritual exercise, and which finally led to a spiritual libertinism that was the opposite of the attitude of the

foqahâ, in the sense that this libertinism professed a *bâtin* without *zâhir*. The reasons for which mystical theosophists like the masters of the shaykhie school criticize Sufism, in their turn, aim above all, besides a doctrine misunderstanding the meaning of the univocity of being (*wahdat al-wojûd*), at the organization and the congregational practices of Sufism (*tarîqat*), Shî'ism being already, as such in its integral essence, the « *tarîqat* » par excellence; the criticism is aimed at the role assumed by the person of the shaykh in Sufism (one thinks of the guru in India), because it appears to the Imâmite spiritualist that this role usurps that of the only spiritual master that the Shî'ite follower must recognize and follow, namely the personal guide « invisible to the senses but present in the heart », who is the Hidden Imâm. The general conviction of these masters is the one already stated by Haydar Âmolî, and it is that in its distant origin Sufism was born in Islam through Shi'ism, but that by separating itself from the Imâms of Shi'ism, Sufism has become distorted.

It is as if Sunni Sufism had transferred the content of Imâmology to the person of the Prophet alone, eliminating everything that did not agree with Sunni sentiment. The Sufi idea of the mystical pole, the Qotb, is none other than that of the Imâm; in Shi'ism Sufism, the Imâm remains the pole of the poles as the Seal of the *Walâyat*, whereas in Sunni Sufism the idea of the Qotb merely replaces that of the Imâm professed by Shi'ism. From the time when the great works of Ismaili theosophy (3rd-4th/9th-10th centuries) were born, we see something of this in Sufism. Moreover, why did some Sufis professing Sunnism want to give themselves as bearers of a message from the hidden Imâm? Let us think of the case of Hallâj, who remains inseparable, because we borrow the technical language. It would seem that it was to discredit the latter that one sought to dissociate him from it. And yet, the more one dissociates it from them, the more one justifies the shî'ite judgment on its case.

On the other hand, it should be remembered that Jâbir ibn Hayyân, the famous alchemist, disciple of Imâm Ja'far Sâdiq, according to a constant tradition that nothing can decisively invalidate, was nicknamed the Sufî from the beginning. The alchemy of Ja'far is inseparable from his Shi'ite conceptions: the Imâm is for the spiritual world what the Stone or the Elixir are for the world of Nature. And so it is that one of the most abstruse works of Jâbir provides us with perhaps the first elaboration of the authentically gnostic motif of the Stranger, the allogeous, the spiritual expatriate (gharîb) coming from distant shores. Now the archetype of the Stranger remains in Shi'ite gnosis the person of Salman the Persian (Salman Pârsî) or Salman the Pure (Salman Pâk): a pilgrim in search of the True Prophet, belonging by birth to the Mazdean knighthood, passing through Christianity, finally marked with the seal of pure spiritual Islam by becoming, as a lonely orphan, the adopted of the Imâm. And the case of Salman is the case of all those to whom the famous sentence of Imâm Ja'far refers, to be quoted here again because it has the virtue of a motto: « Islam began as an expatriate and will become an expatriate again as it was in the beginning. Blessed are those among them, the community of Mohammad, who expatriate themselves (the ghorabâ)⁵. »

This call of Imâm Ja'far, as we already know, is one that decisively denies any identification of the « religious » and the « social », for it is not to a « social religion » that the Imâm's call calls. By proclaiming the « spiritual expatriate » blessed, the Imâm calls him to renounce all compromise with the values and orders established in this world, in order to make this very world the field of his « *queste* » for another world, the field of his migration towards what is already invisibly present in this world, the world of the palingenesis and the Resurrection of which the Imâm is the herald. To use a

5 Cf. our study on the « Book of the Glorious » by Jâbir ibn Hayyân (Eranos-Jahrbuch XVIII), Zürich 1950, pp. 104

fashionable language today, let us say that such is the only « presence in the world », the only « engagement » in this world, for the spiritual pilgrim as witness of the absolute. [...]

On the other hand, Imâm Ja'far's sentence has the meaning of a personal eschatology lived now « in the present », because the spiritual expatriation consented to in order to join the way of the Imâm, marks a rupture. And this rupture puts an end to the captivity that keeps man sheltered from the social ramparts erected to guarantee the individual against an immediate spiritual experience; by this rupture, suddenly this ghorbat, this exile that Sohrawardî will typify in a striking account (infra book II) is revealed to the conscience. This sentence of the Imâm calls his faithful to *walâyat*, calls him to devote his love to the pure theophanic figures whose light, by tearing him away from the solitude of his exile, reveals to him all the lies accumulated to disguise the reality of this exile and to lead him to a compromise with this world. Here, Haydar Âmolî's work remains perfectly relevant for Shi'ite spirituality, in the sense that it awakens its follower to the awareness of a triple spiritual combat, in other words, to the combat on a « triple front » that the spiritual person must support in order to respond to the Imâm's call and to safeguard the integrity of his Shi'ism.

Of these « three fronts », we already know two of them from what has been said above. There is a fight against Sunnism as the pure religion of the Sharî'at, that of the doctors of the Law who refuse the vivification of this Law by its spiritual truth, its gnosis. The positions are clear: they are even clearer, if under the pretext of modernizing the Sharî'at, one makes of the « religious law » the « social religion ». And then there is a second battle, more painful and pathetic than the first, since it must be fought, and we have recalled why, within Shi'ism, where the *'orafâ* and the *hokamâ*, faithful to the integral teaching of the holy Imâms, find before them those of the doctors of the Law, the *foqahâ*, who outwardly profess

Shi'ism but who in fact have forgotten the very vocation of Shi'ism, forgotten its esoteric teaching which is the deepening and transfiguration of the Prophetic Revelation by the Imâms. Finally, there is an even more subtle struggle against a certain Sufism that forgets its own origins, a Sufism that, by denying Shi'ism, by forgetting the origins and the source of the *walâyat*, is mistaken as to the one who is its « Seal » and that, by exaggerating the practice of certain techniques to the detriment of what is *'irfân*, gnosis, can degenerate into a pious obscurantism, no longer responding to the problems and expectations of men.

As we shall see again (infra book IV), the whole of Haydar Âmolî's great book responds to this purpose: to bring the foqahâ to recognize the necessity of mystical gnosis (*'irfân*), and to rally those Sufis who are in a way the lost witnesses of Shi'ism within Sunnism. The original relationship between Sufism and Shi'ism will then be re-established. On this condition depends, for Haydar Âmolî, that spiritual Islam survives or perishes. It was there to foresee perfectly from the XIVth century the problems that the evolution of Shi'ism in Iran was going to pose with a growing acuteness until our days. And the terms in which they were posed remain current in the eyes of whoever understands that the stake of the triple combat is none other than the divine deposit entrusted to the man.

II – *The Divine deposit entrusted to Man*

What is at issue is whether or not, in the absence of what the word *bâtin* connotes (the inner, the hidden, the esoteric, the « mystical »), Islamic doctrine as a whole is deprived of the constitutive element that finally gives it its meaning; if the teaching of the Imâms of shi'ism constitutes precisely this esotericism of Islam, as an integral part of the « phenomenon of the Holy Book », because they themselves constitute the

esoteric of the mohammedian Logos or eternal prophetic Reality (*Haqîqat mohammadiya*) and that, consequently, the entire phenomenon of the Holy Book postulates, from the beginning, *zâhir* and *bâtin*, exoteric and esoteric. Thus, Haydar Âmolî is only behaving like the *hokamâ* and the '*orafâ* shî'ites who reject the gnosis of Sufism, because they forget the shî'ite origin, and the Sufis who, because of the same forgetfulness, revile shî'ism. Both of them pretend to ignore that the teachings of the holy Imâms contain all the secrets of the high sciences. Some of them have deliberately left out this aspect, claiming that this teaching concerned only the exoteric sciences, the ritual of the Law, the jurisprudence: some have even insinuated that, if the Imâms had a secret, they did not transmit it to anyone. Those of the Shi'ite foqahâ who have behaved in this way have done so to deny the very existence of esotericism. As for those Sufis who did so, it was to deny their origin, simply forgetting that without Shi'ism and the Imâms, their own theosophy would not exist (cf. text quoted below book IV, i).

The Imâms were not simply interpreters of the shari'at, or rather it should be said that they were interpreting the mystical way (*tarîqat*) and the masters of high theological knowledge (*haqîqat*). Shaykh Ahmad Ahsâ'î and the shaykh school, from the eighteenth century until today, did not support anything else; their spiritual struggle was directed in the same direction as that of Haydar Âmolî. That the Twelve Imams are primordial theophanies; that in their spiritual entity pre-existing their terrestrial manifestation (cf. already supra chap. II), they are invested with a cosmogonic function, these are not so many speculative theories built up late, but evidences stated in the most ancient hadîth, those for example collected in the Kitâb al-Hojjat of Kolayni. If the Christian hermeneutic of the Bible cannot fail to put Christology at the center, the Shi'i hermeneutic of the Qur'an is necessarily an « imâmocentric » hermeneutic. This is because imâmology conceals in itself the

secret of God and man, which means the secret of the instituted relationship between God and man, insofar as this relationship could only be instituted by «men of light» designated as prophets. The theophany of the Twelve Imams, or rather that of the Fourteen Unsullied, is accomplished as a descent from universe to universe in a gradual succession analogous to the succession of the theophanic metamorphoses of the Logos in the book of the «Acts of John¹». The integral hermeneutic of the revealed book embraces these different ontological states, in the order of their descent to the world of earthly man (cf. infra chap. V).

There are also many sayings traditionally attributed to the Prophet and the Imams which explain the allusions of the Qur'anic verses, in order to attest that Islam and the Qur'anic Revelation imply and postulate an esoteric teaching, a hidden higher truth. In addition, it would be necessary to mention here the whole collection of preaches (khotbat) attributed to this or that Imâm, but in which an eternal Imâm is expressed, of which each of the twelve Imâms was an exemplification on earth, since they are all one and the same essence. Among all these preaches, the famous «Preachment of the Declaration» (*khotbat al-Bayan*)² stands out, in which the identity of the

1 Like the mystery of the «Cross of Light», Acts of John, chap. 98 ff. Idea of the metamorphoses of the Logos, already formulated in Philo, and which returns frequently in the writings of Origen, showing the Savior as a man for men, an Angel for Angels, cf. Joseph Barbel, Christos Angelos (Theophaneia, 3), Bonn 1941, p. 292, n°457, 465, 469. This is still the idea formulated in a gnostic text like the Gospel according to Philip (ed. and translation by Jacques E. Ménard, Paris 1967) sentence 26 Cf. our study Divine epiphany and spiritual birth in the Ismaili gnosis (Eranos-Jahrbuch, XXXIII), 1955, chapter I, «Metamorphoses of theophanic visions».

2 Even if this preaching was not actually pronounced by the first Imâm in Kûfa, it was pronounced at a given moment, by an eternal Imâm, in the Shî'ite consciousness, and it is this that is phenomenologically important. In fact, this statement recapitulates many statements scattered in the hadiths held to be the most authentic and a thinker as demanding as Qâzî Sa'îd Qommî held for the authenticity of this statement that he himself commented. It seems to be identical with the Khotbat al-iftikhar (Dhari'at,

Imâm with the Perfect Man (Anthropos teleios) is affirmed, a theme by which Shi'i Imâmology attests its link with the theological motif of the celestial Anthropos, familiar to all the gnoses that preceded it³. Seventy affirmations follow one another, the repeated hammering of which, it is said, finally put the audience into a trance in Kûfa, where the first Imâm had pronounced this sermon. Let us note here some of them: « I am the Sign of the Most Powerful. I am the First and the Last. I am the Manifest and the Hidden. I am the Face of God. I am the Hand of God. I am the side of God. I am He who in the Gospel is called Elijah. I am the One who holds the secret of the Envoy of God... »

The statement of this theophanic secret spontaneously leads our shi'ite authors, such as Haydar Âmolî, to detect in the Koranic verses the commandment which imposes the « discretion », the « discipline of the arcane », taqîyeh or ketmân. Let us note that the attitude designated by one or the other word is not what we call « mental restriction ». It is a safeguard clause, certainly, and quite understandable in the case of the Shi'ites. But, above all, it satisfies a principle of rigorous spiritual honesty. If this honesty is prescribed by the Qur'an, it is because there are exoteric and esoteric elements, and the veiled form in which it is discovered corresponds all the better to its nature. Now, this is the esoteric meaning of the verses referring to the entrusted deposit that should be returned only to the one who is entitled to hold it, and par excellence, the following verses: « Die orders you to return to those to

vol. III, no. 984), which is already mentioned by Ibn Shahr-Ashûb, and a commentary on it by Hasan Sabbâh, the founder of Alamût (ob. 518/1124, cf. Kalâmi Pir, ed. W. Ivanow, pp. 79-81 of the Persian text). The Khotbat al-Bayân is one of a number of proclamations in which Shi'i gnosis is most vigorously asserted: the Khotbat al-tatanjiya (« The proclamation between the two gulfs », tatanj = khalij) has been admirably commented on by Sayyed Kâzem Reshtî. We will come back to it elsewhere.

3 Cf. *Triologie Ismaélienne*, index, s. v. To treat this theme of the Anthropos in the Imamite gnosis as in the Ismaili gnosis would require a whole book, for it dominates all their « adamology ».

whom they belong the entrusted deposits » (4:61). Haydar Âmolî comments that all the secrets of God (*asrâr Allâh*), all the theosophical secrets, are deposits that He has entrusted to the hearts of His Friends (*Awliyâ*). To hand them over to someone who is not entitled to them, because they exceed his capacity, is to incur both the rigors of the Law and the divine wrath. This is why the Imâms themselves prescribed the observance of taqîyeh to their followers.

In fact, such a conception of the nature of the « entrusted deposit », foreseeing, with its consequences, the possibility of transgressing the order to transmit only to the one who is the « heir » - expresses in such a profound way the secret of theosophy and the secret of the Holy Book, that it unveils the very origin of the drama typified in the person of Adam, the terrestrial Adam, the Adam-man. There is a Qur'anic verse whose gravity is such that the very existence and *raison d'être* of what is called esotericism depend on it, because this verse links the mystery of God and the mystery of man as being one and the same mystery. This is the verse where God Himself declared: « We offered the deposit of our secrets to the Heavens, to the Earth and to the mountains: all refused to take it; all trembled to receive it. But man agreed to take it; he is violent and ignorant » (Quran 33:72).

In order to understand this verse, two questions need to be answered: what is the deposit, what secrets are involved? Secondly, what is the violence and unawareness of man? The two questions are inseparable from each other: what are the secrets that man could not have accepted the deposit of, if he were not violent and ignorant? How should this violence and this ignorance lead him to betray this deposit? The ambiguity of this violence foreshadows the drama from which the present human condition originates, the secret of humanity's present destiny. So it would be necessary to mobilize all the Shi'ite traditions, all the hadîths of the Imâms, passing, more or less closely, to the scope of this verse. It would take a whole book.

In short, there is what the Imâms have repeated in the hadîths: « This secret was our *walâyat*. » Now, I is itself the member of a triad constituted by a triple acquiescence: to the Unity of the One (*tawhîd*), to the exoteric mission of the prophets (*nobowwat*), to the esoteric mission of the Friends of God (*walâyat*). The weight of this triple attestation (*shahâdat*) is the weight of man. But the very idea of this triple *shahâdat*, what the second and third sentences aim at, postulates the existence of an all-light humanity, a « celestial » superhumanity, pre-existing the Adamic humanity, the earthly Adam. This is why the full meaning of the Qur'anic verse is only intelligible in relation to the whole cosmogony and prophethology of the Shi'ite gnosis. And it is according to this integral meaning that the violence and ignorance of Adam show an ambiguity, a double face, one of which is to the praise of Adam while the other was his loss, and by this duality is established the agreement between the various Shi'ite allusions to this verse. Let us try to explain the content of these rather dense indications.

It is advisable to keep in mind the statement that the Prophet and the Imâm respectively make about themselves: « I was already a prophet (a *nabî*)... I was already a *walî* (an Imâm), while Adam was still in water and clay », i.e. while Adam was not yet formed. This means that before the Adamic humanity, before the earthly Adam, and of an immeasurable anteriority to the chronologies of what our human sciences call prehistory, there is a seraphic humanity, a group of human creatures of pure light, immaculate, preserved from all fall, « infallible », unlike the Adamic humanity; it is the pleroma of the Fourteen Immaculate (*Shahârdeh Ma'sûm*). Our texts, the commentaries of Qâzî Sa'îd Qommî for example, designate them by significant terms: supreme humanity, humanity of the heights (*al-bashar al-'awâlî*), archangelic humanity (*anâs 'aqliyun*), men of light (*bashar nûrîyûn*) etc. In their longing and ecstasy of love (*walayh wa hayamân*), these beings of light surround

the sublime Throne, the invisible Temple which is the archetype of the temples of all the universes⁴. It is to this anteriority that many hadîth from the Prophet or the Imâms allude; the idea dominates the whole cosmogony and anthropology of the Shi'ite gnosis.

There is, among others, a very long interview of the fifth Imâm, Imâm Mohammad al-Bâqir, with his disciple Jâbir al-Jo'fi. We can only indicate here some of the main features of this sumptuous hadîth⁵. The initial statement is the constant affirmation that the Prophet and the Imâms were the first created beings, when there was neither Heaven nor Earth, neither night nor day, neither sun nor moon, neither Adam nor earthly humanity. The Fourteen Unsullied proceeded as Fourteen Lights (Fourteen « Aiôns » of light) which are, in relation to the light of their Lord, like the rays of the sun in relation to the sun. There is even here a reminiscence of the visio smaragdina of the Apocalypse: the Fourteen Lights are around the Ineffable Presence like so many green pavilions (« And the Throne was surrounded by a rainbow like an emerald » - Apocal. 4:3). From this pleroma of the Fourteen Lights, the genesis of the worlds takes place in the following succession: the Place of Places, the Cosmic Throne, the Heavens and the Angels, the Air and the Genii, and finally the Adam-man. At each of the acts of cosmogony, the triple attestation (*shahâdat*), affirming the divine Singularity (*tawhîd*), the prophetic mission (*nobowwat*) and the initiatory mission (*walâyat*), reappears in one way or another, in mysterious characters, because each of these acts of

4 Cf. Qâzi Sa'id Qommî in his great commentary on the hadîth quoted above p. 80, n. 54. The author has developed his commentary here into a vast treatise on the esoteric meaning of the five great religious practices (*asrâr al-'ibâdât*). We refer here to chapter IV of the *Kitâb Asrâr al-Hajj* (Book of the Esoteric Meanings of the Pilgrimage), fol. 182 (ms. pers.)

5 This hadîth comes from the *Riyâz al-Jannân* of Fazlollâh Mahmûd Fârsî (supra, p. 52, n. 23); it is confirmed by other hadîths of Sadûq Ibn Babûyeh (infra, p. 100, n. 69).

cosmogony corresponds to a particular theophany of the pleroma of the fourteen lights.

The acts of cosmogony and anthropogenesis are closed by a solemn enthronement of the Fourteen Unsullied: «It is because of you that I have created what I have created. You are the elite placed between me and my creation. I have veiled myself through you to my creatures other than you. I have made you such that it is through you that one is in front of me, and that it is through you that every request is addressed to me. For everything will perish except My Face (cf. Qur'an 55:26-27) and you are My Face. You shall not perish, nor shall anyone who chooses you for friends perish⁶.

This solemn text is particularly typical of what is called *hadîth qodsî*, an inspired narrative in which God speaks (as in the Qur'ân itself) in the first person, and whose form finds its explanation and justification in the whole of prophetic gnoseology (infra chapter VI). From a text of this kind it emerges that the fourteen Aîons of light are the primordial theophanic figures, the initial supports of the very idea of Tehophany. For «creating the world» is for the abysmal God to become known, and it is through these Figures alone that he can be known, since, in whatever direction one turns, they are the divine Face that one encounters. Man can only know God by His Names and Attributes, and these Figures are the support of these Names and Attributes. Hence the name *Hojjat* (guarantor, proof) which is given to them par excellence: the Fourteen Unsullied are those who «answer for» the God whom no one can see or reach, and that is why they are the imperishable Divine Face. We shall see later that this is the secret of the «imâmocentrism» of Shi'ite spirituality (infra chap. VIII).

This *hadîth* is confirmed by many others such as those collected by Shaykh Sadûq Ibn Bâbûyeh⁷, where Prophet and

⁶ Quoted in *Tafsîr Mir'at al-anwâr*, pp. 28-29.

⁷ *Hadîth* collected in the *Kitâb al-Mir'âj* of Saduq Ibn Bâbueh, quoted

Imâm are described as two primordial Spirits forming one and the same Light, a bi-unity expressing the double « dimension » of *Haqîqat mohammadiya*. From this it follows that the superhumanity of the mohammadian Logos or the mohammadian Light (*Nûr mohammadi*) pre-exists the Adamic humanity. The nature of this superhumanity becomes clearer when God wants to create Adam the earthly, since the Creator then « kneads » a portion of this Light with a portion of the « clay » of *'Illîyûn* (the highest degree of paradise), and this substance of light is inserted into the substance of Adam. It is thus the divine « dimension » (*jihat haqqîya*, the *lâhût*) which, in the being of the prophets, doubles the human and creaturely « dimension » (*jihat khalqîya*, the *nâsût*); by the first, the prophets receive from God; by the second they communicate to men. For this substance of light introduced in Adam will be transmitted, from prophet to prophet, until the final period of the cycle of prophecy: from 'Abdol-Mottalib, the common grandfather of the Prophet Mohammad and Imâm 'Alî, this substance of light splits into two halves, which are manifested respectively in the person of the Prophet as « Seal of Prophethood » and in the person of the Imâm as « Seal of *Walâyat* »⁸.

Of course, the transmission of this Light is not a physiology of the physical body. It is to be understood in the same way as the physiology of the « subtle body ». It allusively indicates the only idea of « incarnation » that Islamic prophetology could recognize. Finally, it is the precise reminiscence in Islamic theology of the theme of the « True Prophet », professed by primitive Christian prophetology, that of Judeo-Christianity or Ebionism (the « True Prophet » hastening, from prophet to prophet, to the place of his rest, this being, for

in *Tafsîr Mir'at al-anwâr*, p. 30.

8 *Tafsîr*, pp. 25 and 29; Qâzî Sa'îd Qommi, 136b; Haydar Âmolî, op. cit., index of hadîth and index of technical terms s. v. *nûr*. It is recalled that 'Abdol-Mottalib was the father of 'Abdollah, father of the Prophet, and of Abû-Tâlib, father of Imâm 'Alî.

Christianity, the person of Jesus, whereas in Islam it is the person of Mohammad).

These elements having been put together, we can see what the secret entrusted to the Adam-man is, and how the unconsciousness which allows him to accept to take it on, also leads him to betray it.

The holy Imâms have often repeated in their lessons that the secret whose deposit is thus offered to the human creature is their *walâyat*⁹, that is to say, this qualification which makes them the « Friends of God » (*Awliyâ Allâh*), the « guardians of the divine cause » (*al-amr al-ilâhî*), invested with a mission that doubles and completes the prophetic mission (*nabowwat*) and whose purpose is to initiate those who « choose them as friends and guides » to the hidden spiritual meaning, to the esoteric meaning of the Divine Revelations given to the prophets. To « take them for friends » is, on the part of their followers, to dedicate their love to them (their *walâyat* or their *mahabbat*, the two words frequently alternating), thus dedicating this love to the Divine Face which in them shows itself to mankind, and this is what, as we now know, Islam as a prophetic religion is a religion of love, in the form of shî'ism. Those who « take them for friends » are preserved from perishing, for the divine Face is imperishable. That is why the attestation of this *walâyat*, as a devotion of love, responding, on the side of the faithful, to the divine dilection of which the DOuze Imâms are the object, - this attestation (*shahâdat*) is the final and indispensable completion of a triple Attestation: Attestation of the One (the Super-being, the Ineffable, the Unpredictable), Attestation of the prophetic mission which reveals Him to mankind (as to His Names, His Attributes, His Operations), attestation of the Imâmat by this *walâyat*, devotion of love constitutive of faith itself (*imân*), which

⁹ Cf. the *hadîth* of the Imâms collected as a commentary on verse 33:72 in *Kitâb al-Borhân fî tafsîr al-Qorân* by Hâshim b. Solayman al-Hosayn al-Bahrânî (ob. 1107 or 1109 h.), Tehran 1375 (1956), vol. III, pp. 340 ff.

attests that the Imâm is the initiating guide to the hidden meaning of these Names, these Attributes, these Operations.

That is why all the Shi'i doctors agree on this point: *tawhîd*, the Attestation of the One, is in the same relation to the Attestation of the prophetic mission as it is to the Attestation of the One; in other words, *walâyat* is in the same relation to *nobowwat* as it is to *tawhîd*. The three phases of the attestation form an inseparable whole. The testimony of the faithful, of the *walâyat* of which they are the object on the part of God, closes and seals the whole, to such an extent that without *walâyat*, without this devotion of love that the term connotes, not only is faith vain, but there is no faith (*îmân*) in the full sense of the word¹⁰.

It is this triple shahâdat that has been mysteriously written, from universe to universe, at each level of the theophanies, because it concerns the Principle and the double movement of which the Principle is both the point of origin and the point of return: the movement of genesis that proceeds from it and the movement of return that leads back to it, *mabda'* and *ma'âd*. This pair of terms expresses in its cosmic aspect the same bi-unity of which other examples express the religious aspect: *tanzîl* and *ta'wîl* (descent of the Revelation and reconduction of the revealed letter to its archetype by spiritual hermeneutics), *nobowwat* (prophetic mission) and *imâmat*. That is why, at each level of theophanies, the same triple commitment (*mithâq*) has been asked from the beings that populate the universe corresponding to this theophanic level, until the descent of the theophanies reaches the earthly man¹¹.

10 Cf. *Tafsîr Mir'at al-anwâr*, pp. 19 and 25 ff. (chap IV: that *walâyat* was presented to men at the same time as *tawhîd*).

11 See Qâzî Sa'îd Qommî, *Kitâb asrâr al-Hajj* (supra p. 98, n. 66), chapter V, which begins with a long hadîth of the sixth Imâm concerning the secret of the Black Stone (cf. our study on The Configuration of the Temple of Ka'ba as the Secret of Spiritual Life, in *Eranos-Jahrbuch XXXIV*, pp. 129 ff.) « What comes to my mind, » writes Qâzî Sa'îd, « to explain this mysterious account, is that the best that can be said is that the reception of the commitment (*mithâq*) took place in several successive abodes or levels,

The Shi'i doctors agree on the meaning of the scene of the primordial « Covenant » described in the Qur'anic verse 7:171, on the scope of the question put to mankind in the mystery of meta-history: « Am I not your Lord » (*A-lasto bi-rabbi-kom?*). Along with *tawhîd*, the commitment to the message of the prophets to come and to the imâmat of their Imâms¹² was proposed to all the posterity of Adam¹³. Although mankind responded with a « yes », its teachers know that this « yes »

according to the descent of the thing from the Upper Heavens to the Lower Heavens, » fol. 183. The Tafsîr Mir'at al-anwâr draws the same teaching from a long hadîth of the fifth Imâm, where it is said among other things: « Then He created the angels, then He showed Himself to them and received from them the mithâq towards Himself as regards robûbiyat, towards Mohammad as regards *nobowwat*, towards 'Alî as regards *walâyat* » p. 29. There was therefore a mithâq prior to that which was required from the Adam ancestor of the earthly Adamics (7:171). On the other hand, it will be noted that the prostration of the angels before Adam (2: 28) would concern only the lower malâ'ika, not the four angels supporting the Throne (*'arsh*), nor those who are called *al-'âlûna* (the Sublime) and who are the Veils, the Lights of the *Haqiqat mohammadiya* of which the Throne is constituted (because it is precisely before these Lights shining in Adam that the malâ'ika bowed down), nies Karûbiyûn (Cherubim) who are called the « angels of the Veils ». Cf. Shaykh Ahmad Ahsâ'i, commentary on Ziyârat al-jâmi'a (supra n. 48), p. 117. Imamite adamology, like Ismaili adamology, knows an Adam on several levels (Adam al-akbar, Adam the major, the cosmic Adam, Adam al-asghar, Adam the minor, the little Adam, etc.).

12 It is necessary to mention here one of the strongest pages of Mollâ Sadrâ, commenting on the Qur'anic verse 7:171, in his great commentary on Kolaynî, Sharh al-osûl minâ'l-Kâfî, Tehran s. d. p. 321. Sadra refers to the different levels of manifestation of souls (at the level of the world of the Intelligences, the Malakût, the mundus imaginalis or barzakh, and finally the physical world). He refers to Plato's doctrine of the pre-existence of souls and notes its perfect concordance with verse 7:171. However, he considers that one should not simply speak of pre-existence; one should take into account that « over there » souls have another mode of being and manifestation. The *zohûr* of which the verse speaks, the « lombs » which contained the sons of Adam, were precisely the Intelligences, the 'oqûl as being their « fathers », at the time of their pre-existence at the level of the world of Intelligence. We will come back to this hermeneutic in the context of a work specially devoted to Mollâ Sadrâ Shîrâzî. Let us simply observe here that this agreement between Platonism and Shî'ism on the pre-existence

was not pronounced by all in the same way. But the fact remains that in Adam's humanity, as was recalled above, was deposited the pure substance of light of the prophetic messages to come. It is precisely through this pure substance of light that the Adam-man answers this « yes ». It is, in him, that which utters this « yes » (and this is what is symbolized by the line of hierohistory, the Prophet saying to the Imâm: « I and you, we were the first to answer yes »). The dreaded burden before which the heavens, the earth and the mountains had trembled, man accepts to assume (Qur'an 33:72). And what he says yes to is the very secret of theophanies, the mystery of the revealed Face of the Unknowable, which can only be revealed by concealing itself in Figures that reveal it, and this is what gives us the permanent link between imâmology and esoterica.

There too, a grandiose hermeneutic is given free rein, developing what in Shi'ite spirituality would correspond to the *De dignitate hominis* theme of our Platonists of the Renaissance. It was necessary that the man was violent and unconscious to assume the deposit of such a formidable secret, and under this aspect the two qualifications turn to his praise. Haydar Âmolî says it: there are magnificent secrets there, themes of an unfathomable depth. So he devoted a whole treatise to them (*Risâlat al-amâna*), of which unfortunately we have not been able to find any manuscript so far. However, we can make up for it to a certain extent, by all that this same Qur'anic verse (33:72) has inspired the Shi'ite commentators.

What is this violence and ignorance that man shows in assuming the divine deposit? A courageous violence that man,

of souls was not inaugurated by Mollâ Sadrâ. Seven centuries earlier, Ibn Bâbüyeh in his *Kitâb al-I'tiqâdât* (Symbol of Faith), a fundamental work for Shi'ite thought, professed the doctrine of pre-existence in terms whose Platonic resonance is striking.

13 On the implication of the recognition of the walâyat of the Imâm in the "yes" (*balâ*) given in answer, on the "day of the Covenant" (*mithâq*) to the question "A-lasto ?" cf. especially the *Tafsîr Mir'at al-anwâr*, *Moqadamat I*, *Maqâlat II*, 4th fasl, pp. 25

typified in Adam, does to himself: to assume the divine secret is to annihilate his own self before the absolute Ipsity; it is to decide to ignore everything that is other than God, to ignore even that there is something other than God. At this limit, the mystery of man is resolved in the mystery of God. The secret of the Attestation of the One is to deny all that is not God, to know that there is only God to be (this is what Haydar Âmolî calls ontological *tawhîd*, in relation to which theological *tawhîd* is only a first phase, such that, if one is immobilized in it, one risks succumbing to the trap of metaphysical idolatry).

When a thing transgresses its limit, it is transformed into its opposite. So it was with the violence and ignorance in question: they had been, in fact, a heroic folly, a sublime unconsciousness, without which the man-Adam could not have assumed the secrets of God. The two qualifications here are indeed in praise of man: Adam, by the concentration of his spiritual energy (his *himma*), lifted the weight even though it was beyond his strength. Someone asked him (who? The symbolic story does not say): « You have prejudged your strength. Didn't you know that the burden is crushing? » And Adam replied, « I was ignorant of anything other than God¹⁴. » He could then assume the burden of the esoteric, the secret of those to whom it was said, « You are my Face. »

For his part, Qâzî Sa'îd Qommî will say that in this state, human knowledge is like spiritual circles, where, unlike material circles, « it is the center that surrounds the periphery. » The intelligence as center, « encompasses » all the lights that are its knowledge. Hence « knowledge is a single point of which only the ignorant make a multiplicity ». This multiplicity bursts forth with the other, and that is why Qâzî Sa'îd Qommî can say that it is to this ignorance that verse 33:72¹⁵ refers.

14 Cf. Mollâ Fathollâh, *Minhaj al-Sâdiqîn* (great commentary on the Qurân in Persian, in 3 vol. in-fol.), Tehran 1309 h., vol. II, ad 33:72.

15 Cf. Qâzî Sa'îd Qommî, Commentary on the *Tawhîd* of Ibn Babûyeh, chap. II, 35th hadîth, 4th matlab, fol. 137, who refers here to the *Theology* of

Thus, as long as Adam, the man, does not know that there is another than God to be, he is able to carry by the strength of his sublime ignorance, the weight of the divine secrets: he is the « *theophoros* ». From the moment when it is no longer enough to be God, he ceases to ignore all that is other than God, and at the same time, poses this other. The theophanic figures are other than God; so why should he need their mediation? And if their mediation is superfluous, why should he not have direct access to the esoteric himself, without the intermediary of an exoteric who manifests and reveals it? For as long as there is another, he himself is also this other; therefore why should he still need another than himself? The sublime ignorance turns around and inverts itself into a vertigo of pride before itself, a vertigo that blinds it to any recognition of the other, and pushes it to appropriate everything that is of the other. It is this vertigo that the hierohistory symbolically tells.

The divine secret referred to in the Qur'anic verse 33:72 was the *walâyat* of the Imâms; we now know the reason for this - the reason why this *walâyat* was precisely the tree of paradise which should not be touched, the tree which should not be profaned. In his commentary on this verse, Imâm Ja'far al-Sâdiq¹⁶ states that Adam was given the vision of the divine superhumanity of the Fourteen Unsullied in the blazing Glory of the Throne. Adam is astonished: is there then a humanity superior to mine, created « in Heaven » before him? Now, precisely the light of these superhumans, of this « celestial » humanity, was the deposit that had been entrusted to him and

Aristotle. Haydar Âmolî has also commented at length on this verse; the ignorance of the other is the foundation of ontological *tawhîd*. The secret of the deposit entrusted to Adam was the *walâyat* of the Imâms, and Adam having come to betray this deposit, the statement of the sixth Imâm then takes on an extraordinary allusive significance: « Our cause is heavy, difficult; only an angel of the highest rank, a prophet sent, or a believer whose heart has been tested by God through faith, can assume it. »

16 Cf. *the Kitâb al-Borhân* (*supra* p. 101, n. 71), vol. III, pp. 340-342.

whose secret he had assumed. These, at the level of their Adamic manifestation, were to be his own lineage. But this is what is no longer enough for the Adam-man. This deposit entrusted to him he wants to seize it for himself. He succumbs to a vestige of ambition, transgresses his own limit by wanting to reach himself, already, the rank which could be manifested only at the end of his lineage, with the one who would be the « Seal of the ».

This was to touch the « forbidden tree », to violate the « discipline of the arcane ». The tree symbolizes both the *walâyat* of the Imâms, which the Adam-man claims to replace, and the science of the Imâms, the science of that humanity of light (*bashar nûrîyûn*), which the Adam-man wants to reach prematurely, although he has neither the strength nor the capacity to bear it. « He is a violent and ignorant person. » says verse 33:72. As Qâzî Sa'îd Qommî explains with remarkable profundity, the knowing subject and the objects of his knowledge (the cognoscibles) are necessarily equal in level. The cognoscibles are actualized by the knowing subject, just as the food becomes a part of the subject who feeds on it. Now, by touching the tree of Knowledge, which was forbidden to him, by « eating » its fruit, his « cognoscibles », Adam eo ipso obliged them to « come down »; and this was, for him, eo ipso, « to come down from paradise »¹⁷.

What is remarkable in this conception is the link thus established between the transgression of Adam, of man, and the transgression of the esoteric. The Shi'ite gnosis, as esoteric of the Prophetic Revelation, rejected and persecuted by all « the violet and the ignorant », could only be attentive, as it was, to the meaning of this transgression, which is in fact a regression that degrades knowledge, reducing it to an inferior level, forbidding it to perceive the symbols. No more hierognosis communicating with the universes beyond; no

¹⁷ Qâzî Sa'îd Qommî, *Kitâb asrâr al-Hajj* (supra p. 98, n. 66) chap. VII, fol. 186.

more perception of suprasensible spiritual things. By rejecting the weight of the divine secrets first assumed, by betraying the deposit entrusted to him, man has become an agnostic. It is in this sense that we can say that verse 33:72 links the mystery of God and the mystery of man to each other.

No less remarkable is the consonance between the Ismaili hermeneutic and the Twelver Shi'ite hermeneutic of Adam's sin. For both of them it is not a drama of the flesh but a drama of human knowledge. According to Ismaili hierohistory¹⁸, Adam was constituted as a prophet and Imâm at the beginning of our present « cycle of occultation » (*dawr al-satr*), the conditions of which are totally different from those of the cycle of epiphany (*dawr al-kashf*) which preceded it. The laws of knowledge are different; man can only perceive spiritual things through a thorough knowledge of correspondences. But analogical knowledge, the perception of symbols, presupposes the bipolarity of *shari'at* and *haqîqat*, of the positive letter and the spiritual truth or gnosis, of the exoteric and the esoteric. Now what Adam wants to reach, on the question of Iblis, is a knowledge which is out of his measure: he claims to have a direct perception of the esoteric, of the hidden spiritual reality, by stripping it of the exoteric envelope through which it appears and which signifies it (some theologians in fashion nowadays speak of « demystification » and « demythologization », without realizing what they are doing). Adam wants to seize by violence a knowledge which is essentially the science of the Resurrection, and which belongs to the last Imâm of the cycle (the Qâ'im) to reveal to men. This

18 See the note *Herméneutique spirituelle comparée* (cited above p. 27, n. 4) where the chapters that Qâzî No'mân, in his *Asâs al-ta'wil*, dedicates to Adam and Noah are studied. It is striking to note the convergence of the spiritual hermeneutics of the case of Adam and the case of Noah with the spiritual hermeneutics of Swedenborg in his *Arcana caelestia* (the detailed references are given in the cited study). Cf. also our *History of Islamic Philosophy* I, pp. 60 ff. 124 ff. and our study *Divine Epiphany...* (cited above p. 95, n. 63), pp. 162 ff.

knowledge escaping him because it exceeds his capacity, Adam finds himself only in front of his own nakedness, i.e. his own inner darkness, his own ignorance. In wanting to « strip off » the esoteric, what Adam does is to be stripped of the garment of the divine Word which, like a robe of light, dispelled all darkness within him. What is left then? The recollection of the lost symbols, and this is what it means for man to cover his nakedness with the « leaves of the garden »...

It is therefore understandable that the inner meaning of the Qur'anic verses prescribing fidelity to the entrusted deposit, Shi'ite esotericism, with Haydar Âmolî, understands the imperative to which its own existence is linked: « O you who are faithful, do not betray God and his Messenger, by betraying the deposits that have been entrusted to you, since you are among those who know » (8:27). We have been shown what this entrusted deposit is, and now we can understand that there are two ways to betray it, both of which lead to the same result.

One can betray it by trying to take it by violence, by stripping it of the envelope that conditions its transparency, by renouncing the « discipline of the arcane » . In doing so, it is left to the unfit who, unable to understand it, can only violate and distort it. They confuse, for example, what is spiritual resurrection and what is social insurrection; the finality of their effort does not even reach the limit or the idea of the new birth, spiritual birth (*wilâdat rūhaniya*) imposes its meaning.

But one can also betray the entrusted deposit by denying it purely and simply, and this denial is remarkably facilitated by the first form of betrayal, since by it the esoteric has already ceased to be what it was, and its content has been distorted. The pure and simple rejection is all forms of agnosticism, from the pious agnosticism of the Doctors of the Law and their social successors, to the positivism of the technocrats. The former degrades the knowledge of spiritual things to the level of the knowledge of natural or social things, the latter ignores

all spiritual science. The agreement with the rejection of all that the esoteric connotes, the radical degradation of the exoteric itself (the *zâhir*), because there can be no sharî'at in its true state in the absence of gnosis (*'irfan* and *haqîqat*), and it is absurd to speak of an « orthodox » Sufism as a Sufism that would be without gnosis. Left to itself, the exoteric (the sensible, the manifest), ceasing to symbolize with the invisible, with the suprasensible, is no more than dead nature, desiccated bark, derisory chrysalis. The sharî'at, such as it understands it the legalistic and social religion, and the Nature such as it questions it and exploits it the technocratic science, are only two aspects of the same decay. Secularization and socialization of the spiritual go hand in hand with the will to power of a utilitarian and agnostic science. This is why the external peril coming from the « technique » of the West is a peril for the traditional Shi'ite Islam, only insofar as it would have rejected, betrayed « the divine deposit assumed by man » .

The heavier this deposit is, the more the Adam-man carries it by his nostalgia and repentance, i.e. after having found it after a long quest. There is among the talks of Imâm Ja'far a magnificent symbolic story whose motif offers a striking reminiscence of the famous Song of the Pearl in the Gnostic book of the « *Acts of Thomas* » and which thus perhaps provides us with the key to the symbolism of the « pearl » and of the « quest for the pearl » (we shall find another reminiscence in Sohrawardî's « The Reality of the Western Exile », infra Book II). The Imâm asks a disciple: « Do you know what the Black Stone is? (the Stone embedded in one of the corners of the Ka'ba temple in Makkah) ». And the Imâm told his disciple that the Black Stone had been an angel given as a companion to Adam in paradise, to remind him of his promise (his commitment, the *mithâq*). Better still, she was the angel who, at the center of Adam's being, had been given the responsibility of the « entrusted deposit », for it is in the

malakût, the angelic world of the soul, that is, in the esoteric of the visible world, that the scenes evoked by the Qur'anic verses of the « Covenant» (7:171) and of the « entrusted deposit» (33:72) are accomplished. When God returned to Adam because of his repentance, he changed this Angel into a « white pearl» which he projected from paradise to Adam « going down» on the road to exile. But Adam did not recognize it at first and saw it as just another stone. It was necessary that by his repentance he peels off this pearl of its coating, so that the pearl, by taking again its first form, speaks to him, reminds him of his engagement and awakes in him the memory of his fatherland of light. Then Adam wept. And again the angel is hidden and disappears under the guise of a very precious mineral, which Adam carries on his shoulder all along the route that leads him from Ceylon to the Mecca. When he is tired, the angel Gabriel, who accompanies him, takes it off his shoulders and carries it in turn. This is how the « angel of Adam», the esoteric Adam, came into this world. And the Black Stone was placed in one of the corners of the Temple, which is at the center of the world, since the angel is at the center of Adam's being¹⁹.

This deposit entrusted to him, the angel hidden in Adam, is the weight of the divine secrets that Adam, after having found the pearl of gnosis, carries with him. So heavy is the weight that Gabriel, the angel of knowledge and revelation, must help him carry it.

Also, the Imâms of Shî'ism have repeated one after the other the sentence that we already know: « Our cause is difficult, heavy to take on; only an Angel of the highest rank, or a prophet sent, or a believer whose heart God has tested for faith is capable of it.» We shall see later (chap. V) that this statement of the Imâms preludes all their esoteric teaching.

19 For the « secret of the Black Stone » as explained in a long hadîth of Imâm Ja'far al-Sâdiq, commented by Qâzî Sa'id Qommî, see our study on The Configuration of the Ka'ba Temple (cited above p. 102, n. 73), pp. 130ff.

These tested believers are those of the Shi'is whose «yes», whose acquiescence at the pre-eternal scene of the «Covenant» was without reluctance, those who «were created with a ray of the light of the Fourteen Immaculate». Imâm Ja'far also alludes to this in the great hadîth which we have quoted here earlier (supra p. 52): «Our cause is difficult,» said the Imâm. To support it, we need consciences where the dawn rises, hearts ablaze with light, healthy souls, beautiful natures. It is because God has already received the commitment of our Shi'ites [...]. O my God! Let them live by our life, let them die by our death. Let not the enemy prevail over them, for if you let the enemy prevail over them, there will be no one left to worship you in this world.²⁰ »

These are the witnesses who assume the integral shî'ism and perpetuate the transmission of the gnosis in this world (the *silsilat al-'irfân*); they are the ones who can carry the weight of the entrusted deposit, assume the cause of the Imâms, because they are the believers «whose hearts God has tested by faith», and that is why there were never more than a handful of true believers around the Imâms... These are the ones to whom we hear the first Imâm alluding already during a conversation with his disciple Komayl.



²⁰ This is the long *hadîth* already quoted above and referred to in note 23 on page 52.

BERSERKER

BOOKS

